



Bulletin

NUMBER

#14-11-02

DATE

July 9, 2014

OF INTEREST TO

County Directors

Nation/Tribal Directors

Income Maintenance
Supervisors and Staff

Employment Services
Managers and Supervisors

Tribal Employment
Services Managers and
Supervisors

ACTION/DUE DATE

Changes are effective upon
receipt.

EXPIRATION DATE

July 9, 2016

Policy Changes to Education and Training Activities in the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP)

PURPOSE

To provide information to county and tribal human services and employment services staff about changes in MFIP policy regarding education and training.

CONTACT

Submit questions to Policy Quest.

SIGNED

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Assistant Commissioner
Children and Family Services Administration

TERMINOLOGY NOTICE

The terminology used to describe people we serve has changed over time. The Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) supports the use of "People First" language.

Background

In the 2014 legislative session, the Minnesota State Legislature changed state policies for the Minnesota Family Investment Program regarding education and training. Those changes include:

- New directions on how education and training activities are to be treated as work activities in employment plans;
- An end to having a county-level cap on the proportion of adults meeting Work Participation Rate requirements who are participating in education and training activities.

These changes create more opportunities for adults receiving assistance through MFIP to pursue education and training. The State is aware that those opportunities will not always result in activities that can be counted toward meeting the Work Participation Rate. Participants must be given the opportunity to pursue education and training, whether or not those activities count toward the Work Participation Rate.

These changes also change the role of the employment counselor: under these changes in law, employment counselors are counselors and advisors regarding education and its role in an employment plan. They no longer approve or deny education plans. But they are expected to play an active role helping participants to gather the information necessary for a well-considered education plan.

The Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) encourages counties, tribes/nations, and employment service providers to focus on developing employment plans that include long term economic outcomes for MFIP families – including consideration of how education and training can increase family income both in the short term and in the long term.

I. Role of Education and Training

The explanation of new education and training policies in MFIP below include:

- A brief summary of the major changes
- Clarity on related policies that did *not* change
- Specifics on policy changes related to Adult Basic Education, English language learning and post-secondary.

A. Summary of the changes to education and training policies in MFIP:

- Employment counselors must inform participants about their options for pursuing education while on MFIP.

- More time is allowed in all education activities:
- Time limits no longer exist for English as Second Language, Functional Work Literacy, Adult Basic Education or General Educational Development (GED) activities.
- Participants may now pursue 48-month post-secondary education programs while receiving MFIP assistance.
- Participants are not required to dedicate a certain number of hours in employment plan activities to core hours in order to pursue English as a Second language, Functional Work Literacy, Adult Basic Education or GED activities.
- Participants must still meet hourly requirements for their employment plans.
- Adults who pursue any education program must demonstrate satisfactory progress in order to continue in those activities.

B. What is unchanged in education and training policy

Hourly requirements

All adults receiving MFIP must have employment plans that meet the following hourly requirements for activities (unless they qualify for an exemption):

- 87 hours a month if there is a child in a single parent family younger than six
- 130 hours a month if the youngest child in a single-parent family is six or older
- 130 hours a month if the household is only a pregnant woman with no children
- 130 hours a month If two parents are in the household, but one is not active on the MFIP case
- 55 hours a week for two-parent families households

Documentation

Adults pursuing training and education activities must still submit the documentation necessary to:

- secure child care assistance if they want that assistance;
- confirm they are making adequate progress; and
- meet the requirements of the state's Work Verification Plan. (These are the verification requirements that demonstrate attendance, etc.)

The Coding of Workforce One

These changes in state policy do not require any changes in how employment counselors should code activities in Workforce One.

C. Specifics of the changes to education and training policy in MFIP

GED coursework, high school completion for adults 20 or older, and Adult Basic Education:

- Anyone who lacks a high school diploma, GED credential or an adult high school diploma may choose to participate in Adult Basic Education to pursue those credentials as an approved work activity. That means these activities are no longer available only to those adults with a reading or mathematics proficiency below the 9th grade level.
- A cap on the portion of hours in these activities that can be used in the employment plan no longer exists. This means that someone pursuing a high school diploma, a GED credential or an adult high school diploma no longer needs to supplement time in these activities with core activities. The participant may choose to meet all their required hours in these education activities.
- Participants still have the option to combine Adult Basic Education activities with other activities that will advance their efforts to become self-sufficient.
- Participants must make satisfactory progress in order to continue in these activities as part of their employment plans.

Education as a second language or functional work literacy:

- Any adult whose spoken English language proficiency scores SPL6 or lower, as measured by a national recognized test, must be allowed to pursue English as a Second Language or Functional Work Literacy for employment plan activities. Participants may continue in these activities until their spoken language proficiency scores at SPL6. A 24-month limit to pursuing those activities no longer exists.
- A cap on the portion of hours that those activities can be used in the employment plan no longer exists. This means that someone pursuing English language training no longer needs to supplement time in these activities with core activities. The participant may choose to meet all required hours in these education activities.
- Participants still have the option to combine the English learning activities with other activities that will advance their ability to become self-sufficient.
- Participants must make satisfactory progress in order to continue this activity as part of their MFIP employment plans.

Post-Secondary Education:

- Participants may enroll in post-secondary education programs that require up to 48 months to complete.
- Participants no longer must include core activities in their employment plans to complement post-secondary education that is beyond the 12 months recognized in the Work Participation Rate.
- The employment counselor no longer has a role of approving or denying post-secondary education plans, and the law no longer requires the participant to provide documentation justifying the post-secondary education plan. Pursuing post-secondary education no longer requires having to:
 - Establish that the employment goal can only be met with additional training or education.
 - Establish that the education or training will result in significantly higher wages

- Assess the participant's current motivation or changes in previous circumstances.
- But employment counselors still have an important role that focuses on their counseling expertise. The law says employment counselors should help participants gather the information necessary to inform a thoughtful education plan and should:
 - work with participants to evaluate their options;
 - advise them on whether there are suitable employment opportunities where they live or are willing to live;
 - assist participants in exploring whether they can meet requirements for admission into the programs;
 - discuss the participant's strengths and challenges based on MFIP assessments, previous education, training and work history.
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- Participants now have 12 weeks – instead of just six weeks – to search for a job consistent with the education after completing a post-secondary program before they are required to accept job offers unrelated to their field of education.
- Students pursuing some very specific post-secondary education may enter into those activities without having to share their plan with their employment counselor in order to start those activities. Those activities include:
 - Recognized career pathway programs (such as FastTRAC) that lead to stackable education credentials;
 - A training program that lasts 12 weeks or fewer; or
 - The final year of a multiyear postsecondary education or training program.

Counties, tribes and MFIP employment service agencies must inform participants about education and training opportunities

In addition to the existing requirement that the MFIP overview inform adults who have turned to MFIP about the options they have for education and training, t DHS now requires counties, tribes and employment services agencies to inform MFIP participants that they have the options to pursue Adult Basic Education, English language learning options and post-secondary education. This information should be included in conversations between employment counselors and participants about employment plans.

If someone meets the basic eligibility requirements for pursuing education or training, MFIP employment counselors can no longer deny the option for education and training.

Employment counselors are expected to play an important counseling and advising role in helping participants sort out their own goals, the most promising paths available to help them realize those goals, and the implications of different choices. This means employment counselors' professional expertise about labor market opportunities and counselors' abilities to engage participants successfully become even more important.

II. Lifting the education caps for the MFIP county caseload

The federal Work Participation Rate rules for determining whether a state has met its performance target include a provision that states that of all the adults counted as meeting the Work Participation Rate, only 30% of that total can be enrolled in education or training activities. That cap includes adults pursuing up to 12 months of post-secondary education and teen parents attending high school or GED preparation. (The federal calculations of Minnesota's Work Participation Rate discard any parents enrolled in those education or training activities beyond the 30% cap.)

As of August 2014, Minnesota will no longer hold each county accountable to a local 30% cap. The state of Minnesota has not reached its 30% cap in recent years. Although the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Work Participation Rate will continue as a performance measure under the Consolidated Fund until 2016, DHS will **not** require a Work Participation Rate Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) from a county or tribe/nation that fails to meet its Work Participation Rate target only because they had more than 30% of people meeting the target by participating in education or training activity.

When each county manages to the 30% cap, some counties inevitably fall below the 30% cap and the state as a whole falls short of the 30% cap and loses an opportunity to have more individuals recognized as meeting the Work Participation Rate.

Minnesota will continue to track the 30% cap at a state level.

Legal Authority:

Minnesota Statutes, section 256J.49

Minnesota Statutes, section 256J.53

Minnesota Statutes, section 265J.531

Minnesota Statutes, section 256J.751

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Advisory

This information is available in accessible formats for people with disabilities by calling (651) 431-4049 (voice) or toll free at (800) 234-1138 or by using your preferred relay service. For other information on disability rights and protections, contact the agency's ADA coordinator.